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RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUESEN/SKOPJE BETA
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000887

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STATE FOR EUR/SCE (MCCLUNG), DS/ITA/EUR, DS/IP/EUR

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KCRM](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [MK](#)

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: MAJOR POLICE ACTION AGAINST CRIMINAL
GROUP IN NORTHWEST

REF: A. SKOPJE 698

[1](#)B. SKOPJE 712

TARGET: CRIMINAL GANG IN NORTHWEST MACEDONIA

[1](#)1. (SBU) The Ministry of Interior (MOI) informed us today that a police operation began early this morning against a group of 30-40 armed ethnic Albanian criminals who have been holed up outside of the northwest village of Brodec near the Kosovo border since July. The group includes escapees from the Dubrava Prison in Kosovo (ref A), and has been under MOI surveillance for the past several months. MOI reports indicate the group has been involved in weapons smuggling since arriving in Brodec this summer. MOI contacts also tell us the group had imposed a curfew on local residents, and had beaten some villagers. The group allegedly was in the final stages of planning an attack on Skopje (no further information available on specific targeting) before the police action began, and possessed MANPADS for which group members reportedly had received training. Ethnic Albanian parties in Macedonia have distanced themselves from the group, and we have advised both DUI and DPA (the largest ethnic Albanian parties here) that we view this operation as a legitimate law enforcement action. A senior DUI official told us that DUI held a similar view, and was concerned about possible casualties among local residents.

UNDER POLICE PRESSURE, CRIMINALS FLEE TO VILLAGE

[1](#)2. (SBU) The operation began with the movement by helicopter and MOI vehicles of approximately 400 police officers into position above and around Brodec the evening of November 6. One helicopter was hit by ground fire and returned safely to base. Around 0500 hours on November 7, elements of the MOI's Rapid Deployment Unit (RDU) and Task Force (Tigers) special operations forces began moving on the criminal group's positions outside of Brodec, which MOI sources reported included trenches and buildings constructed by the group.

[1](#)3. (SBU) As of midday November 7, the MOI confirmed that some of those buildings were aflame. The MOI later reported four members of the group had been killed in exchanges of gunfire with police, and that another three members might have been killed. Police also have reported discovering a large cache of ammunition, rocket-propelled grenades, machine guns, and

MANPADS belonging to the group. There have been no reported police casualties in the operation. Local media report one MOI helicopter was shot down, but the MOI has denied that report. The MOI also coordinated with KFOR, which deployed reinforced units to the border area to handle any members of the criminal group who might try to flee there.

¶4. (SBU) Under pressure from the RDU forces, the group fled its position outside Brodec and entered the village, where group members holed up in residents' houses. Police surrounded one house where five suspects were sheltering and were firing from windows at the law enforcement officials. As of 1430 local time, the police had entered that house and arrested six subjects. The MOI intends to continue working to identify the houses where the individuals are holed up, and will then attempt to negotiate with those individuals to persuade them to surrender. If that tactic fails, they plan to use force to capture the remaining group members.

¶5. (SBU) The MOI has kept us informed of the activities of the criminal group since this summer, and we have repeatedly told the GOM that we would support actions to enforce rule of law in the region, provided they developed a detailed plan and consulted with our ICITAP Adviser and OSCE's Police Adviser beforehand. The Minister of Interior and Chief of Police briefed the Ambassador on the security situation in the area during a meeting November 5. At the time, the Chief of Police hinted that an operation was imminent, but gave no further details; we did not learn about the launch of this risky operation until after the fact. The MOI did/did keep KFOR in the loop as the operation got underway, a positive development that we had urged in the November 5 and earlier meetings with the MOI.

COMMENT: RISKY GAMBIT

SKOPJE 00000887 002 OF 002

¶6. (SBU) That the operation took place today probably is partly due to increasing pressure the GOM has felt from some local and international critics who have complained that the government has failed to demonstrate it can exercise effective control over its territory. If the police capture the remaining criminals with no further bloodshed or civilian casualties, then the operation likely will be considered a major law enforcement success. If they are forced to enter houses to capture the fugitives and there are civilian (and/or police) casualties as a result, the GOM is likely to come under domestic fire for botching the operation. The GOM then would be subjected to strong domestic and international scrutiny regarding whether it properly planned the operation.

We will continue to press the GOM to ensure liaison with international police advisers on such operations takes place before/before they take place, rather than after the fact.

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